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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [ECON](#) [MCAP](#) [KCRM](#) [AF](#) [UZ](#)  
SUBJECT: STRATEGIC TERMEZ RIVER PORT PLAYS QUIET ROLE IN  
AFGHAN-UZBEK COMMERCE

REF: A. TASHKENT 561  
[1](#)B. TASHKENT 400  
[1](#)C. TASHKENT 113  
[1](#)D. 07 TASHKENT 1900  
[1](#)E. 07 TASHKENT 2177  
[1](#)F. 07 TASHKENT 2162

Classified By: Political Officer Tim Buckley for reasons 1.4 (B,D)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: On June 27 the Ambassador and emboffs made a rare visit to the Termez City River Port on the southern border with Afghanistan. Barges at the Soviet-era facility transfer goods from road and rail links to the upstream Afghan town of Hayraton, returning with agricultural produce. Port Director Kayum Jumaev noted that lower port fees make barge transfers a cheaper alternative than shipments on rail cars via the Friendship Bridge 12 kilometers upstream. He also added that disaggregated cargo on river barges is much easier and quicker to inspect. Some supplies for International Security Assistance Forces (ISAF) in Afghanistan, such as drinking water from the Uzbekistan bottling plant in Namangan, are often transshipped via the river port, and it could play a more significant future role in a northern ground supply route if a Dubai-based shipping company proceeds with planned upgrades and investments.

[1](#)2. (C) An INL-funded project implemented by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) will soon provide much-needed upgrades to counter-narcotic interdiction capabilities. Kamol Dusmetov, the top Uzbek drug official, welcomed greater U.S. Government counter-narcotics cooperation but said mil-to-mil proposals need to be properly coordinated with GOU agencies since the Ministry of Defense by itself does not have the proper mandate. He also said

proposed DEA reengagement should, under his direction, encompass more entities than just the Ministry of Internal Affairs. Building effective counter-narcotics cooperation will hinge on improving coordination between our governments and encouraging Uzbek officials to put turf issues and bureaucratic rigidity aside -- we have our work cut out for us. End summary.

#### A Rare Visit to the Sensitive River Port

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¶3. (C) Ambassador and emboffs made a rare visit on June 27 to the Termez River Port, which the Government of Uzbekistan (GOU) considers a restricted, sensitive zone. Permission to visit was granted in conjunction with the initial assessment of an INL-funded, UNODC-implemented assistance project to enhance interdiction capabilities. The Soviet-era port facility is equipped with four large cranes for transferring cargo between barges and rail and road junctions. Jumaev proudly pointed out a Soviet-legacy fumigation device used to treat agricultural goods arriving from Afghanistan, which he said is unique in the world for its ability to accommodate an entire rail car. A residential neighborhood abuts the western side of the facility with almost no setback between private yards and the security fence. Jumaev informed emboffs that a Dubai-based shipping company has expressed serious interest in making investments to upgrade the port facilities, which the GOU is reportedly excited about.

¶4. (C) During the time of our visit there two large barges moored at the port along with a support vessel. One barge

contained a large cargo of roots from Afghanistan that was reportedly bound for China as an ingredient in medicines. The dock was piled high with boxes of raisins from Afghanistan, and Jumaev added that Afghan dates are also a common export. Despite the cargoes there was no sign of any workers processing the goods. Jumaev said there used to be regularly scheduled commercial vessels plying the waters of the Amu Daryo River between Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan until 1994, when the security situation deteriorated. Strained relations between the former Soviet republics did not help, he added. (Comment: Encouraging the neighboring countries to restore their historic maritime ties - the river was also an important artery in ancient times when it was known as the Oxus - could eventually expand commercial links and development. For now, however, there are not even air links between the capitals of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan due to the sour relationship. End comment.)

#### River Crossing Cheaper than Rail?

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¶5. (C) Jumaev insisted that it is more economical to ship goods across the river on barges rather than via the Friendship Bridge (the only fixed link between Uzbekistan and Afghanistan), which accommodates both road and rail traffic approximately 12 kilometers upstream from Termez at the Ayratom-Hayraton crossing. Even though it involves an extra step, Jumaev said the assessed fees are lower. He smiled and added that "the river port fees will always be lower," regardless of whether rail fees are adjusted. In a July 1 follow up inquiry, the State Agency for River Transport informed us that port fees are USD 7-8 per ton of cargo, which includes fees for loading, unloading, storing, and transportation. The fees for the rail bridge are USD 180 per rail car, according to the same agency. Jumaev also noted that the disaggregated cargo spread out on open-bed barges allows customs officials to inspect goods more quickly and efficiently than at the rail crossing, which saves time and money. (Comment: The rail track ends shortly after crossing the bridge into Afghanistan, so cargoes need to be offloaded from trains, anyway, but the short barge trip still represents an extra mode of transport in getting goods across. Both the bridge and the port are state-operated, which is the main reason it can be more economical to add a barge segment into the logistical mix when road and rail segments are already necessary. End Comment.)

## Military Supplies to Afghanistan

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¶16. (C) Jumaev noted that bottled drinking water from Uzbekistan (the Nestle factory in the Ferghana Valley city of Namangan) and paper products are often shipped through the Termez river port en route to Afghanistan. This is an important supply for U.S. and ISAF forces in Afghanistan and an example of the strategic role that Uzbekistan's infrastructure already plays in a northern ground supply route. The seemingly obscure Termez River Port, along with the more well-known Friendship Bridge, may become even more important to U.S. interests in Afghanistan as military planners seek to expand a stable and secure ground line of communication (GLOC) via Russia, Kazakhstan, and Uzbekistan.

## Helping Afghan Farmers

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¶17. (C) Dusmetov stated that the Termez River Port is already serving to expand opportunities for Afghan farmers to access new markets in Central Asia and beyond, as the boxes of raisins and dates lining the wharf attest. Yet UNODC officials also noted that production of narcotics in Afghanistan is soaring, so the trick is to fine-tune a balance between facilitating commerce on one hand and stronger interdiction efforts on the other. (Comment: It was refreshing to hear an Uzbek official commenting about the importance of facilitating the development of the agricultural sector in Afghanistan, which contrasts with the long-held view that the southern river border should be a fortress. End comment.)

## Upgrading Interdiction Capabilities

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¶18. (C) The U.S. is the only sponsor (through State Department's INL Bureau) of a new UNODC-implemented project to enhance the interdiction capabilities and security of the Termez River Port. While much investment has been made to upgrade the road and rail crossing at Ayratom-Hayraton, which also included U.S. assistance from INL (ref F), there have been no upgrades to the river port facility since Soviet times. Customs and Border Guard officials present for the assessment visit provided a wish list of equipment upgrades, which includes advanced x-ray machines, scales, additional canines, floodlights, and a network of CCTV cameras. There is currently only one canine available to assist customs officers with inspections, compared with 10 at the recently completed Ayratom-Hayraton crossing.

¶19. (C) Comment: Mysteriously, the recording mechanism in the network of 56 advanced CCTV cameras at the modern Ayratom-Hayraton checkpoint malfunctioned very quickly and has never been repaired by the Government of Uzbekistan despite UNODC's work to put them in touch with the appropriate contractors (ref E). This limits the utility of the network for investigative purposes and raises eyebrows about whether some customs and border guard officials have a vested interest in preventing the establishment of a digital record of cross-border activity (ref C). We will follow up with the Uzbeks about this and will not recommend any similar equipment investment until the issue has been satisfactorily resolved. There is also an issue with truck scales which have been broken for more than six months without corrective action by the Uzbeks, who are now responsible for the repairs, according to UNODC. Ambassador and emboffs also visited the impressive Ayratom-Hayraton facility on June 26. End comment.

## Bureaucratic Turf Thwarts Mil-to-Mil Counter-Narcotics Plans

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¶10. (C) In a casual chat along the wharf, Dusmetov noted that recent mil-to-mil meetings focusing on counter-narcotics cooperation were welcome by the Government of Uzbekistan (ref

A), but he stated "don't expect a response any time soon." He elaborated that counter-narcotics work "is outside the competency area" of the Uzbek military and the Ministry of Defense therefore is not authorized to take the lead on such matters, even if it involves a primarily mil-to-mil with a counter-narcotics element. It's not like your system," Dusmetov continued, "and such proposals should be directed to

my office since we are responsible for counter-narcotics affairs." (Comment: Dusmetov wanted to convey that the dialogue to date, including formal diplomatic notes, on possible U.S. Department of Defense counter-narcotics assistance has not included the right people. Dusmetov has two titles: he is the Director of the National Center for Drug Control and the Deputy Chairman of the State Commission of Drug Control of the Cabinet of Ministers. The Chairman of the latter is the Prime Minister, which makes Dusmetov the highest-ranking dedicated official on counter-narcotics issues. Dusmetov conceded that the ultimate decision still "goes to the top," that is, to President Karimov, but the path it takes to his desk matters. End comment.)

#### DEA Should Seek Wider Range of Interlocutors

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¶11. (C) Dusmetov similarly explained that his entity, the State Commission on Drug Control, must be at the center of the decision to approve DEA's request to return to Uzbekistan (ref B), but they have thus far not been the primary interlocutor. (Note: Per ref D, it was Dusmetov himself who first hinted to poloff in late 2007 that the GOU would welcome DEA's return. End note). He also criticized DEA's previous work in Uzbekistan as being too focused on the Ministry of Internal Affairs, under which the Sensitive Investigative Unit operates. Rather, "DEA should also be working with a much broader group of stakeholders, including my office, the National Security Service (which includes the Border Guards), Customs, and the military."

#### Comment

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¶12. (C) The often overlooked Termez City River Port already plays an active role in the transit of goods on this strategic north-south corridor, as does the more well-known Friendship Bridge. Together, this infrastructure is central to our interests in Afghanistan, specifically in developing stable supply routes to ISAF troops; stemming the northward flow of narcotics; and expanding economic links with neighboring Central Asian countries. However, we learned that we need to redouble our efforts to link the planned participation of several U.S. Government agencies in counter-narcotics assistance with the appropriate corresponding Uzbek entity. Proposals seem to get misrouted or stalled in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which lacks the clout to move proposals efficiently through the system. This coordination challenge is formidable, especially since there are turf issues between Uzbek government entities as well as stifling bureaucracy. As a result, we may need to repackage our counter-narcotics proposals from the Department of Defense and the DEA to get them on the right and fast track.

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